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Saudi Arabia-USSR: Still No Ties

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Some articles are preliminary views of a subject or speculative, but the contents normally will be coordinated as appropriate with other offices within CIA. Occasionally an article will represent the views of a single analyst; these items will be designated as noncoordinated views. Comments may be directed to the authors.

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Articles**Internal and External Threats
to Qadhafi's Regime**

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Libyan leader Qadhafi, who recently celebrated his 15th year in power, faces significant opposition both at home and abroad. His radical economic, political, and social schemes, enforced with ruthless police measures, have pushed popular discontent to its highest level since he seized power in 1969. At the same time, his policies of destabilization in Africa and the Middle East have antagonized his immediate neighbors. Nonetheless, Qadhafi remains firmly in control: an unusually brutal security crackdown last summer disrupted the opposition network inside Libya, and the well-equipped and increasingly proficient armed forces deter would-be invaders. In our view, barring an assassination or sudden fatal illness, Qadhafi can expect to celebrate his 16th anniversary next September.

thousands of Libyans suspected of antiregime activity have been arrested and many condemned to death. The Front lost its senior military commander in the operation in May,

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Qadhafi also has acted abroad to keep the opposition off balance. His rapprochement with Morocco has denied the Front a safehaven and training site.

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Last summer Libyan agents killed or wounded several Libyan dissidents in Europe.

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Sources of Opposition

Disgruntled Army officers are the greatest internal threat to Qadhafi, but they are unlikely to carry off a successful coup within the next six to 12 months. Last summer Qadhafi reassigned his military commanders.

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Qadhafi has placed loyal tribesmen in key positions in the military to act as a further check against coup plotting.

Other smaller dissident groups claim to be planning operations in Libya or garnering support from foreign governments. Available evidence indicates that they have no demonstrated capability to carry out any sabotage or other limited military action.

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The National Front for the Salvation of Libya, based in Sudan, is the largest of several Libyan opposition groups and the one responsible for the commando assault on Qadhafi's headquarters last May.

Qadhafi's mass security sweeps almost certainly disrupted the Front's network of active agents and supporters.

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Popular Mood

The disarray within the opposition comes at a time of widespread discontent with Qadhafi's rule. Declining oil revenues and Qadhafi's socialist experiments have led to shortages of consumer goods. Talk of relocating city dwellers to rural agricultural projects and the continued induction of women into the armed forces have frightened and offended all classes. To improve his standing with the Army and the public, Qadhafi is curbing abuses of authority by the increasingly powerful Revolutionary Committees. He will move cautiously, however, to avoid alienating the committees, which comprise his strongest supporters.

National Salvation Front propaganda and radiobroadcasts from Sudan—

—seek to exploit popular grievances. In addition, isolated sabotage or local unrest in Libya suggest that significant opposition to the regime exists. Nonetheless, Qadhafi's recent public appearances before large crowds and his brief travels to Greece, Malta, and Spain suggest that his confidence in his political standing has recovered.

Prospects for the Opposition

The National Salvation Front will have to mount another attack soon to capitalize on existing discontent and maintain its credibility as a force capable of challenging Qadhafi. The Front must conduct a sustained campaign inside Libya to have any chance of sparking a military uprising and sweeping Qadhafi aside. Such an effort, however, requires outside help.

We believe the Front has sought the aid of other Arab states opposed to Qadhafi. Iraq has given prominent media coverage to the Libyan opposition and has promised the Front military assistance.

The PLO is too riven with internal problems to provide much aid, and we believe that

Egypt is reluctant to escalate its differences with Qadhafi to the point of undertaking sustained covert operations for fear of provoking a like response from Qadhafi. Neither do we believe that Algeria intends to support a major covert effort against Libya. Neither Cairo nor Algiers wishes to confront increased domestic opposition supported by Libya. In addition, a large and active dissident presence on their soil would risk conventional military retaliation from Tripoli, such as the Libyan airstrike against the Front's radiobroadcast facility in Omdurman last March.

A more likely possibility is that both Egypt and Algeria might allow trained and armed dissidents to transit their territory and infiltrate across their long borders with Libya. Both countries, however, would be especially sensitive to Libyan accusations that linked them to a US effort against Libya.

The Front's strategy so far has been to stage spectacular paramilitary attacks in hopes of stirring a general uprising against Qadhafi. A commando assault, however, is the tactic most easily crushed by Libyan security forces. Another raid similar to the attack the Front launched last May probably would end in failure and hand a serious setback to dissident hopes of challenging the regime.

Another course of action for the Front and other dissident groups would be a campaign of sabotage against regime facilities, particularly military installations, government offices, and nationalized businesses. A sustained campaign of this sort at some point might raise discontent—and regime repression—to a level where the Army, perhaps in cooperation with less doctrinaire members of the regime, might remove Qadhafi and restore domestic order.

We believe that intensified opposition efforts to destabilize Qadhafi's regime would provoke a harsh Libyan response both at home and abroad. Several spectacular Libyan attacks last year—the airstrike on Omdurman, the Embassy shootout in London, and the attempted assassination of former Prime Minister Bakkush—were aimed against the opposition.

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At a minimum, Qadhafi would launch another security crackdown to root out opposition supporters. In addition, Qadhafi would intensify his efforts to kill dissidents abroad, particularly the Front's leadership. In our view, a renewed round of domestic repression would further alienate the regime from the populace.

Qadhafi also would look for ways to retaliate against suspected foreign supporters of dissident attacks. We expect that he would step up support for legal and illegal opposition elements in those countries supporting his opposition. In addition, he probably would sponsor terrorist attacks against his antagonists, perhaps employing Palestinian or other radical Arab surrogates. Neither can we rule out a demonstrative conventional military retaliation such as mining Alexandria harbor or launching airstrikes against suspected dissident facilities in neighboring countries. Finally, Qadhafi might directly attack US interests, particularly if Cairo were implicated in a dissident action.

We anticipate that Qadhafi will follow his pattern of combining military or terrorist attacks with diplomatic overtures for better relations. A prerequisite almost certainly will be cessation of support for Libyan dissidents. In our view, even Sudan—the Front's strongest backer—might consider cutting a deal with Qadhafi in which Khartoum would drop support for the Front in return for the prospect of better relations with Libya.

Regional Military Threats

While he keeps a tight lid on opposition at home, Qadhafi also must guard against conventional military threats from his angry neighbors.

many Egyptian officers are pushing President Mubarak to respond to the frequent Libyan provocations of this past year—the most galling being the mining of the Red Sea. At the same time, Libyan relations with Algeria have steadily deteriorated as Qadhafi's ambitions in Tunisia and his treaty with Morocco endanger important Algerian interests. In both cases, though, we believe that Qadhafi has sufficient forces at his disposal to constrain his enemies.

Egypt and Algeria are the two main countries that can bring military pressure to bear on Qadhafi. Sudan

and Tunisia, also opposed to Libyan machinations, are too weak militarily and too distracted by internal problems to pose a threat. Both Algeria and Egypt can amass greater firepower than Libya, and both can sustain intensive combat longer than Libya. Nonetheless, Libya's military strength is sufficient to deter both Algiers and Cairo from putting their military dominance to the test. Although both have let Qadhafi know of their readiness to respond to any Libyan military attack, they have been careful to avoid the appearance of preparing a unilateral strike across Libya's frontiers.

Libya has concentrated the largest and strongest elements of its armed forces in the eastern sector, facing Egypt. Even so, the military balance is such that Egypt would ultimately win any war with Libya, but only after investing massive military and economic resources and after suffering painful Libyan counterpunches.

Qadhafi's impression that his military strength in the east is adequate to deter Egyptian "adventurism" could be shaken by Egyptian military posturing. Increased Egyptian military activity—such as large troop rotations, exercises, and alerts—near the border could prompt Qadhafi to reassess Cairo's intentions. A fear that he has underestimated Mubarak's firmness could force him to moderate his actions temporarily, even to the point of reducing the Libyan presence in Chad to return his eastern forces to full strength. At present, however, Cairo shows little interest in engaging in brinkmanship with Tripoli.

Algeria's ground forces are much stronger than those of Libya (Algeria's Army has some 110,000 troops; Libya's has 55,000) but would probably be turned against Libya only after a provocation such as an attack against Tunisia or an attempt to press Libyan claims to Algerian territory. Barring such a threat, Algeria's military focus will remain on Morocco.

Implications for the United States

In our view, Qadhafi can control for the near term both the internal and external threats to his regime. He will be undaunted, therefore, in continuing to

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undermine US interests in the region, confident that he can parry any response to his actions short of direct US military retaliation.

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Moreover, Qadhafi may be emboldened by his successful weathering of dissident attacks and his ability to provoke his neighbors at little military cost. We believe he may seek opportunities to stage additional spectacular actions—such as the Red Sea mining—which embarrass US allies and directly threaten US interests. Over time—perhaps not a long time—weary friends of the United States in the area may follow Moroccan King Hassan's example and seek a respite from Libyan aggression through a modus vivendi with Qadhafi.

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It is possible that Qadhafi might miscalculate and so embarrass Cairo or Algiers that those governments would be forced to retaliate. In that event a brief border war with either Egypt or Algeria could ensue, with concomitant complications for US policy in the region. A conflict with Egypt, in particular, probably would be viewed as a test of US commitments and prestige.

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Saudi Arabia-USSR: Still No Ties

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The Saudis have not relaxed significantly their reluctance to expand ties with Moscow, despite recent speculation that Riyadh is considering such a move. Relations have been marginally more cordial in the last year, but contacts are minimal and confined to diplomatic formalities.

Movement toward a more correct relationship was derailed, however, by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the growing Soviet presence in the Yemens. The Iranian revolution also intensified Saudi fears that the Soviets would try to exploit the chaos in Tehran to expand their influence.

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Riyadh continues to insist that expanded ties are blocked by the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and poor Soviet treatment of Muslims in the USSR. The Saudis are also concerned about Soviet inroads in the Yemens and the Horn of Africa, lukewarm Soviet support for the Arabs in the Arab-Israeli confrontation, and what they judge is continuing ideological hostility from Moscow.

Still, the Saudis appeared willing to use the prospect of expanded ties with Moscow to press the United States about its continued support for Israel and the Camp David accords. The difficulty of purchasing military equipment from the United States and the growing political risks to Riyadh of highly visible links to Washington also engendered public and private speculation about a more balanced policy. Hints of expanded ties to Moscow often followed Arab diplomatic setbacks in the area—such as Israel's seizure of the Golan Heights and invasion of Lebanon.

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A growing number of Saudis view the lack of diplomatic ties as an anachronism, and pressure may increase on King Fahd to consider further contacts. Riyadh recognizes the propaganda value for Moscow of renewed ties and will not make such a move until it is assured of comparable benefits.

Substantive Contacts

Despite these occasional hints, the only significant sign of Saudi willingness to deal more openly with Moscow was the trip by Saudi Foreign Minister Saud to Moscow and Beijing in December 1982 as part of a delegation of Arab League foreign ministers seeking diplomatic resolution of the Iran-Iraq war. According to Embassy reporting, the Saudis viewed the move as a way to burnish their Arab credentials and deflect pressure from Syria for a more balanced foreign policy, and they denied that the trip had any bilateral significance.

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Background

Saudi-Soviet relations were more cordial in the early years after Moscow extended diplomatic recognition to King Abd al-Aziz's new kingdom in 1926. Although these ties were never formally broken in the decades that followed, Riyadh increasingly shunned contacts with the Soviets and other Communist states. By the late 1960s Saudi criticism of Moscow intensified, driven largely by King Faisal's strong religious commitment and deep aversion to what he believed was the evil of Communism.

Saud's trip received extensive press coverage in Saudi Arabia, but public comments continued to focus on the obstacles that remained to formal diplomatic ties—especially the continuing Soviet presence in Afghanistan, anti-Saudi propaganda in the Soviet media, and Soviet treatment of Muslims in the USSR. The Saudis praised Soviet support for the

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By the late 1970s the Saudis, although still strongly anti-Communist, began to pursue a more pragmatic line toward Moscow. Soviet inroads in the Yemens and the Horn of Africa intensified Saudi concern about encirclement by the USSR, but Riyadh saw no use in a confrontational attitude.

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Arab states, but, according to US officials, they continued to shy away from endorsing an active Soviet role in the Middle East peace process. []

Continued Caution

Discreet contacts occur occasionally between senior Saudi and Soviet officials. Crown Prince Abdallah talked with the Soviet Ambassador to Kuwait at a reception there in November, but the Saudis stressed to US officials that the meeting was unplanned. []

The Saudis remain extremely sensitive to highly visible contacts with the Soviets or potentially controversial public statements about Saudi-Soviet relations. According to Embassy reporting, King Fahd was unhappy about the press play accorded a dinner given in Washington in April 1984 by the Saudi Ambassador that was attended by Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin. The Saudi Government also issued a clarification of remarks made by its Ambassador a few days earlier to the National Press Club suggesting the Arabs might turn to the Soviets for weapons if obtaining them from the United States proved difficult. []

The Saudis are careful in criticizing the Soviets, although the Saudi press gave extensive coverage to the fifth anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December, according to Embassy reporting. They avoided, for example, direct criticism of the Soviet shootdown of the Korean airliner in September 1983, despite US demarches. Nor did they press Moscow to permit Soviet Muslims to make the annual pilgrimage (Hajj). According to Saudi figures, only 14 Soviet Muslims traveled to Saudi Arabia, compared to 1,200 Chinese Muslims and more than 5,000 Afghans. []

Some Economic Ties

Commercial and economic relations are minimal. Imports from the Soviet Union and other Communist countries account for only 1 percent of Saudi Arabia's imports. According to Embassy reporting, Saudi Foreign Minister Saud acknowledged in April that the Foreign Ministry had established a small office to handle economic relations with Communist countries but not the USSR. []

There has been some indirect oil trade since spring 1983. [] the Saudis are selling oil to the Soviet Union on Iraq's behalf, most of which is shipped directly on non-Soviet carriers to India. Official Soviet figures put the amount at approximately 34,000 barrels per day. We judge that the Saudis are not likely to maintain this arrangement if Iraq begins exporting additional oil or the war with Iran winds down. []

Current Saudi Position

We see no real movement in the Saudi-Soviet relationship despite recent marginal changes.

Recent public statements by senior Saudi officials have reiterated earlier Saudi themes. According to Foreign Minister Saud in an interview in late November, Riyadh acknowledges the importance of the Soviet Union as a superpower and its "positive role." We judge, however, that the continued Soviet occupation of Afghanistan will make the Saudis deeply reluctant to upgrade ties. Saudi religious leaders are also adamantly opposed, according to Embassy reporting, and the government would be reluctant to provoke them without having clear gains to show for it. []

Saudi reluctance will be reinforced by King Fahd's firm control of Saudi foreign policy and his desire to maintain close ties to the United States. We judge

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that some in the Saudi leadership, however, view the lack of relations as anachronistic and believe Saudi Arabia should pursue expanded ties to Moscow. Crown Prince Abdallah is generally believed to be more willing to renew relations with the USSR, but this may in part be a tactical move to balance the King's pro-US stance. According to US officials, Prince Saud and Abdallah consult closely on foreign policy issues, and Saud's comments suggest he may share the Crown Prince's inclination to expand ties to Moscow. []

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Prospects

Any Saudi inclination to expand ties to Moscow will continue to be hampered, in our judgment, by the Saudis' deep aversion to a regime they believe is atheistic, aggressive, and expansionist. They are sensitive to the Soviet presence in the Yemens, and they fear that the risks of subversion would increase dramatically if the Soviets had a diplomatic mission in Riyadh. []

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The status of relations is not likely to be affected by the Saudi-US link, in our judgment, despite occasional Saudi complaints about US policies in the region. The Saudis, including Abdallah, continue to rely on the United States as the ultimate guarantor of their security in the region, and they are not likely to flirt with the Soviets if they believe this would impair the US commitment. []

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They probably expect, moreover, that a larger Soviet role in the region would have a polarizing effect, especially on the peace process. Recent Soviet inroads—the renewed ties with Egypt and the expanded Soviet influence in Syria during the Lebanon crisis—have made the Saudis uneasy about increasing Soviet leverage. []

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Saudi leaders ultimately will hesitate as long as they judge that they will be giving more than they get in return for establishing relations. Any rapprochement with Moscow will be costly because of conservative domestic opposition and US suspicions and will be a propaganda coup for Moscow. There is little that Moscow can offer to make such a move attractive to Riyadh. []

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